

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 00887 121758Z

70

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 SAM-01 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5468

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

FOSIF ROTA

COMSIXTHFLT

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0887

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS PFOR PINS MR SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN MAURITANIAN
ZONE

1. SPANISH MILITARY ATTACHE TOLD EMBOFF APRIL 11 THAT THERE
CONTINUE TO BE PERIODIC, USUALLY MINOR, ENGAGEMENTS INSIDE
MAURITANIA FROM BIR MOGHREIN TO ALGERIAN BORDER. THESE EN-
COUNTERS USUALLY INVOLVE MAURITANIAN MILITARY PATROLS WHICH
INTERCEPT, SOMETIMES ACCIDENTALLY, POLISARIO FORCES TRANSPORTING
SUPPLIES FROM ALGERIA TO GUELTA ZEMMUR REGION WHICH CONTINUES
UNDER POLISARIO CONTROL. LAST SUCH INCIDENT TOOK PLACE AT END
OF MARCH JUST NORTH OF BIR MOGHREIN. LARGE GIRM FORCES
OCCASIONALLY MAKE PATROLS AS FAR AS CHEGGA IN NORTHEAST CORNER OF
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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 00887 121758Z

MAURITANIA. POLISARIO CONTROLS NORTHERNMOST TIER OF

MAURITANIA MUCH OF TIME. WHEN LARGE GIRM PATROLS COME INTO AREA, HOWEVER, POLISARIO FORCES DISAPPEAR. 'AIN BEN TILI, OUTPOST ON NORTHERN MAURITANIAN-SAHARAN FRONTIER, REMAINS EMPTY ALTHOUGH GIRM TROOPS PERIODICALLY PATROL UP TO FRONTIER. ONLY MOROCCAN TROOPS STILL POSTED INSIDE MAURITANIA'S 1960 BOUNDARIES ARE LOCATED AT BIR MOGHREIN. APPROXIMATELY 100 MOROCCANS, MAINLY SPECIALISTS, OPERATE ABOUT EIGHT ARTILLERY PIECES AND THREE OR FOUR TANKS. LATTER ARE IN PLACE PRIMARILY FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL PURPOSES AS THEY PLAY VERY MINOR COMBAT ROLE.

2. MAURITANIAN PORTION OF SAHARA IS UNUSUALLY QUIET. SPANISH ATTACHE SAID THERE HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY NO MILITARY ACTIVITY IN MAURITANIAN-CONTROLLED PORTION OF WESTERN SAHARA FOR PAST MONTH AND HALF, ALTHOUGH POLISARIO ATTACKS HAVE CONTINUED ON MOROCCAN ZONE. ATTACHE CONFIRMED THAT MAURITANIANS HAVE TAKEN CONTROL OF DAKHLA PORT AND REPORTS THAT EARLY THIS MONTH THEY REPLACED MOROCCANS AT AIRPORT (NOUAKCHOTT 776). AT THE SAME TIME, SMALL DETACHMENT OF MOROCCAN TROOPS REMAINS POSTED SEVERAL KILOMETERS NORTH OF DAKHLA AND MOROCCAN ARTILLERY BATTERY IS STILL LOCATED AT AUSERT.

3. SPANISH ATTACHE IS PUZZLED BY LACK OF MAURITANIAN-POLISARIO CONTACT INSIDE MAURITANIAN-CONTROLLED SAHARA AND BY RELATIVELY LOW LEVEL OF MILITARY ACTIVITY INSIDE MAURITANIA. HE BELIEVES POLISARIO CURRENTLY HAS CAPACITY TO INFLICT FAR MORE DAMAGE ON GIRM FORCES THAN IT IS DOING. ALTHOUGH HE HAS NO FIRM EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT BELIEF, HE WONDERS IF THERE HAS BEEN TACIT OR EVEN FORMAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN GIRM AND POLISARIO TO LIMIT MILITARY CONTACT. HANDY SIDE

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